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ABSTRACT

To gain a basic understanding of some factors (i.e., community composition, family environment, and general retention of Mexican values) influencing the vocational aspirations of the Mexican American, several studies are reviewed. The literature reviewed disproves some of the common stereotypes as deterministic ethnic factors for the vocational attitudes of the Mexican American and empirically supports the fact that the level of acculturation and family style is one of the main determinants of the Mexican American's values and attitudes, specifically when dealing with vocationally related issues. The idea that ethnicity is not the single predominant determinant is supported. In spite of all argumentation in favor of or against a specific factor or factors which influence the vocational aspirations of Mexican Americans, no particular response seems to provide an adequate answer to the question. In general, research has found a lack of differentiation in the perceptions of vocational aspirations of Mexican Americans when compared to Anglo Americans. However, the attainment of aspirations appears to be greatly influenced by the level of acculturation rather than one's ethnicity. Therefore, the "level of acculturation" must be considered when providing vocational counseling to the Mexican American. (Author/NQA)

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Vocational Aspirations of the Mexican-American and the Influence of Acculturation in Their Attainment

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Running head: Vocational Aspirations

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Abstract

Several studies related to vocational aspirations were reviewed. In general, research has found a lack of differentiation in the perceptions of vocational aspirations of Mexican-Americans when compared to Anglo Americans. However, the attainment of aspirations appeared to be greatly influenced by the level of acculturation rather than one's ethnicity. Therefore the "level of acculturation" must be considered when providing vocational counseling to the Mexican-American.

Vocational Aspirations of the Mexican-American and the Influence of Acculturation in Their Attainment

The current literature in the social sciences has presented an image of the Mexican-American as locked into the present, incapable or unwilling to project life plans and events into the future. This attitude is widely believed to be responsible in part for the lack of social mobility and assimilation by Mexican-Americans. However there is little empirical support for said contention, which may well be a product of distortion and biases on the part of the social scientists. While the significant lack of upward mobility among Mexican-Americans is an unquestionable phenomenon, there seems to be no single explanation for it. Indeed, various factors have been implicated in an attempt to explain these circumstances: traditional values, such as close family atmosphere, fatalism, present gratification, and personalism (Marshall & Miller, 1977), lack of role models (Schumaker & Getter, 1977), low vocational values as determined by lack of desire to acquire a college degree (Aiken, 1979), early marriage and the expectation of having large families (Edington & Hays, 1978), incongruencies between vocational aspirations and amount of schooling desired (Martinez, Hays, & Solway, 1979), and many more. A major failing in most reported research is the implied assumption that Mexican-Americans constitute a stable group. In fact, Mexican-Americans are a continuously migrating group, a characteristic which differentiates them from other minorities which have been established, stable groups in this country for a considerable length of time. In fact, all of the literature reviewed here has failed to note that distinction when referring to the Mexican-Americans, yet the continuing influx of predominantly low SES and poorly educated migrants has a depressing effect on group means for occupa-

tional and educational levels. In order to gain a basic understanding of some of the factors influencing the vocational aspirations of the Mexican-American, several studies will be discussed. It should be noted that some of the literature is controversial and contradictory.

The Community

It has frequently been observed that there are substantial differences in the level of educational attainment between White and Mexican-American children. For example, the median number of years of school attendance by persons 14 years of age and older is 12.1 for Whites, while the comparable statistics for Mexican-Americans in the southwestern states where this minority group is most concentrated reveal Mexican-American educational levels between 6.7 years in Texas and 9.2 years in California (Schumaker & Getter, 1977). These substantial differences in educational achievement affect the patterns of future opportunities available to Mexican-Americans; thus, lesser educational attainment is an influencing factor in vocational attitudes and achievement of the Mexican-American. Schumaker and Getter (1977) studied the influence of the entire community in educational attainment of the Mexican-American. They examined variations in the aggregate level of educational achievement of Chicanos (Mexican-Americans) in 34 counties in Texas and California, each county having a substantial Mexican-American population. Four measures of the educational attainment of Mexican-Americans were examined: a) male median education level, b) female median education level, c) the percentage of Mexican-American males over 25 having completed high school, d) the percentage of Mexican-American females over 25 having completed high school. The community context variables in the analysis were divided into two main types: those variables pertaining directly to

various characteristics of the Mexican-American subcommunity, and those variables indicating the nature of the social and economic structure of the larger community. Schumaker and Getter concluded the more educated and wealthy the entire community population is, the more likely it is that the minority group children will interact with and be socialized by those persons valuing educational achievement. Moreover, Mexican-American children who are raised in more industrial and commercial environments are more likely to develop a broader view of what constitutes potentially useful skills and knowledge than are those children raised in environments which are restricted in models. Schumaker and Getter further concluded that family income is directly associated with educational attainment, and that the presence of more upper-income, non-agriculturally employed Mexican-Americans in the community enhances educational attainment.

The Family

The home environment and the social environment are important socializing agents providing Mexican-Americans with stimuli to pursue or not pursue particular educational and vocational objectives. Martinez, Hays, and Solway (1979) studied the family influence on delinquent and non-delinquent Mexican-Americans. Thirty delinquents and thirty non-delinquent Mexican-American males were matched on age and socio-economic status, and the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale, the Family Environment Scale, and the School Attitude Scale were administered. The aspired and expected levels of educational and occupational status were measured by direct questions. The term delinquent was used to describe Mexican-American adolescents who were being detained at a juvenile probation ward for either burglary, theft, public intoxication, inhaling intoxicants, or aggravated assault. The researchers concluded that

the level of aspiration and expectation was higher for the non-delinquent than for the delinquent Mexican-American. Their findings regarding the self-concept were consistent with earlier findings by other researchers (e.g., Reckless, Dinitz, & Murray, 1956; Gardner, 1960) that non-delinquents have positive self-concepts which serve to insulate them against delinquency. Martinez et al. further concluded that more than twice as many non-delinquents as delinquents aspired to and expected professional job status. Furthermore, the predominant theme among the Mexican-American delinquents was the inconformity with the inflexible and controlling home environment which, according to the investigators, is a product of the strong authoritarian value that prevails in some Mexican-American families.

In 1977 Marshall and Miller reported, seemingly against popular belief, that rural Mexican-American youth aspired to upward mobility as a product of parental pressure and emotional support to achieve in life. Over 36% of the sample studied (n = 343) desired jobs requiring college graduation, whereas only approximately 8% of the family bread winners had attained such jobs. Marshall and Miller (1977) also reported, however, a conflict or incongruency between educational and occupational goals. Twenty-eight percent of the females and 40% of the males from the sample aspired to high level professions which required college graduation but reported a desire for no more than 14 years of schooling. The preceding study provides some support for culturally deterministic explanations of low Mexican-American socio-economic attainment, but it does not support a culturally determined explanation for low aspiration. In support of the deterministic explanation of the lack of mobility of the Mexican-American, Rousek (1976) reported the findings of her study of Mexican-American parents' (n = 45) aspirations for their children

and selected home environmental activities, such as English usage and television exposure. The investigator drew the following conclusions: a) Mexican-American parents who enroll their children in preschools tend to have high educational aspirations for their children; b) lower socio-economic status Mexican-American parents are interested in their children's school activities whether their children have attended preschool or not.

In dealing with the issue of vocational achievement parents seem to play an important and sometimes decisive role. McGuigan (1976) found a high correlation between parental occupation and school achievement among Mexican-American high school seniors (n = 400) in California. The researcher concluded that children of Mexican-Americans occupying professional and semi-professional positions tended to make higher grades than children whose parents were engaged in occupations of a different classification. Cervantes (1977) reported findings supportive of McGuigan's findings. Cervantes studied the relationship between language development and parental values and reported a significant relationship between language spoken at home (English vs. Spanish) and educational level. Families who spoke English at home tended to attain a higher level of education. Secondly, higher educational level was significantly related to non-adherence to traditional Mexican values. However, the researcher failed to define "traditional Mexican values". In the preceding study, the Cervantes' data seem to indicate that speaking English at home is more likely to occur among professionals than other groups.

Special Subgroups within the Mexican-American Community

Another area of interest to the social scientist is the study of behaviors of various subgroups within the Mexican-American community. Castellano (1978) studied the relationship between early father absence and the level of anti-

social behavior in Mexican-Americans. The findings indicated that girls characterized by high levels of anti-social behavior (such as stealing, skipping school, etc.) demonstrated higher egocentrism than girls characterized by lower levels of antisocial behavior. One possible explanation for this finding is the lack of productive vocational aspiration on the part of the girls surveyed. Also, the researcher asserts that this end product of father absence is the result of the Mexican-American mother's inability to deal with the outside world, an inability rooted in the Mexican-American culture's authoritarian value system. Authority is anchored in the father; thus, when he is absent, confusion and lack of direction is prevalent in the family. This implies that the lack of a model may produce the nonproductive behavior as well as a lack of vocational aspirations. Castello predicted that if no help is provided to such adolescents, the majority of these children in father-absent families are restricted to lower class jobs (such as baker, janitor, etc.) or to correctional facilities.

The use of inhalants has been found to be overrepresented among Mexican-Americans (Bonnheim, 1977); thus, it is interesting to look at inhalant users to find relationships among them and vocational aspirations. Bonnheim (1977) conducted a study of the family interactions, acculturation, and vocational interests among Mexican-American inhalant users and concluded that inhalant abuse is related to the quality of family interactions (such as general level of education, family size, etc.) although a direct causal link was not established. Acculturation does not appear to be related to inhalant abuse. Bonnheim failed to find any definite vocational plans within the group; instead, they were undecided or had no plans at all.

Mexican-American children and youth have been compared with Anglo-Americans

on a variety of psychological dimensions. Little attention, however, has been focused on ethnic group differences in attitude toward higher education. The college population of Mexican-Americans exhibit few if any of the traditional values of the typical low socioeconomic status Mexican-American. Instead they seem to exhibit mainstream vocational values. In particular, they aspire to become outstanding individuals within their community. In 1978 Khoury and Thurmond conducted a study comparing the temporal perspectives of 31 Mexican-American college students (mean age = 22). The researchers failed to find any significant statistical difference between the Anglo and Mexican-American college students' conception of time. Khoury and Thurmond (1978) concluded:

> The lack of indication of differences in time perception between Anglo and Mexican-American students, despite the fact that most of the Mexican-Americans had and continue to have ties with the Mexican-American culture, seriously challenges the assertion that a unique time perspective exists among relatively acculturated Mexican-Americans and it is obvious that no single aspect of time perception is sufficient to establish ethnic background nor stereotypic behavior of any ethnic group. (p. 1187)

The previous conclusion refutes the idea that Mexican-Americans do not look at the future when making vocational decisions and attacks the stereotype that Mexican-Americans live and work on a day to day basis. As indicated by the results of the study, Mexican-Americans indeed plan their vocations like Anglo college students. In 1978 Vasquez studied the factors related to performance, attrition, and persistence of Chicana and Anglo women university

students. The particular factors of interest were academic background, psychosocial characteristics, and degree of bicultural identification. The results indicated that the major variables which contributed to differences between the "successful" and "non-successful" groups included high school GPA, socio-economic status, and the subject's perception of the importance to her mother of her graduation. When the variables were analyzed, the ones that best discriminated for Anglos were high school GPA, self predictions of chances of graduating from college, importance of maintaining a B average, and importance of graduation to the father. Those which contributed the most to differences for Chicanas were high school GPA, mother's encouragement to do well in school, and importance of maintaining a B average. The researcher also reported that parents of students who were persisters had higher educational, occupational, and income levels than other parents. Vasquez found that Anglo parents engage in educationally motivating behaviors slightly more than did Mexican-American parents, but Mexican-American parents had higher hopes for their daughters to graduate than did Anglos.

Aiken (1979) investigated the value of certain features of higher education as perceived by samples of Anglo American and Mexican-American college students. An educational value was defined as the usefulness, importance, or worth that students attach to particular goals, activities, subject-matter, or courses that are a part of higher education. The researchers used the Educational Values Inventory (EVI) by Aiken that conceptually relates to the Allport-Vernon-Lindzey Study of Values which is composed of 24 items designed to assess a student's standing on six educational values: aesthetic, leadership, philosophical, scientific, social, and vocational. The questionnaire was administered to a group of 334 subjects which included Mexican-

American female and male students and an equal number of Anglo American female and male students. Aiken reported that ethnicity did not contribute to a statistically significant degree to the educational values of Mexican-Americans. However, Aiken reported that Mexican-American students had a mean higher than that of Anglos on the leadership value score. The researcher concluded that the educational values of his sample are "consistent with the observation that today's college students are more concerned with marketable skills than with the humanistic and philosophical concerns that reportedly characterized their counterparts a decade ago" (Aiken, 1979, p. 320).

General Aspirations, Attitudes, and Values of the Mexican-American

Aspiration refers to the goal that a person would like to achieve, given ideal conditions; expectation refers to a goal that one intends or expects to attain. These may be distinguished conceptually and in terms of realistic mobility orientation (Berman & Haug, 1975). In fact, all immigrants regardless of country of origin possess high aspirations. Mexican immigrants' aspirations and attainments are significantly affected by past income attainment and by knowledge of English. Another factor that seems to influence the aspiration of Mexican-Americans is the authoritarianism within the family group. Madsen's (1965) studies of the Mexican-American in Texas have revealed that the organization of the Mexican-American family possesses many characteristics in common with the Mexican family. Ramirez (1967), who studied the authoritarian factor in Mexican-Americans, supports the idea that both the Mexican-American and other high authoritarian families are typically father dominated and employ strict child-rearing methods emphasizing submission and strong obedience to the will and dictates of authority figures. The results

obtained from this study indicate that young middle-class Mexican-Americans may be experiencing some cognitive dissonance in the area of civil rights. "As members of a minority group it is expected that they will be interested in achieving equality of opportunity for the members of their cultural group by effecting changes in the status quo" (Ramirez, 1967, p. 9). The findings of the study, however, indicate that Mexican-Americans adhere to standards of conformity and authoritarian submission, thus indicating a need to maintain the status quo and certainly to refrain from opposing it. These two attitudes are inconsistent and, as a result, if they are indeed held by the Mexican-American, he or she is likely to be confused and in cognitive dissonance. The preceding study projects the creation of a self-concept among Mexican-Americans which is inconsistent with the demands of the environment; thus one can assume that Mexican-Americans are experiencing unsatisfactory occupations as their psychological self-concepts are inadequately transformed into occupational concepts (Starishevsky & Matlin, 1963).

Another neglected area of research is the creation of expectations of Mexican-Americans and the effect of these expectations on vocational behavior. The stereotype of the Mexican-American male as the "macho" who intends to produce a large family is reflected in the following common joke, "Do you know why only 300 Mexicans showed up at the Alamo? . . . Because they only had three cars." Edington and Hays (1978) shed light upon some of the true family size and marriage expectations of Mexican-Americans. They (Edington & Hays, 1978) conducted a study of twelve high schools in New Mexico concerning students' long range goals and objectives. A large number of questions were presented to students that included student concerns with the number of children they desired and expected and the age at which they wanted and

expected to get married. The sample was made up of an equal number (n = 283) of Anglo Americans and Mexican-Americans. The data revealed that Mexican-Americans expected to marry at 23 years and Anglos at 22.7 years. The data also indicated that Mexican-American youth expected to have fewer children than their parents. The findings of this study refute the previous idea that Mexican-Americans are unable to achieve and engage in long term vocational career plans due to the expectation of early marriages and large families.

Conclusion

The myriad of factors that affect the vocational behavior, attitudes, and values of the Mexican-American appear to be a combination of different influences including the community composition, family environment, and general retention of Mexican values (e.g., authoritarianism). The literature reviewed here disproved some of the common stereotypes as deterministic ethnic factors for the vocational attitudes of the Mexican-American. For the most part, social scientists assume that the average Mexican-American is of low socio-economic status, an assumption supported by educational attainment lower than that of Anglos (Schumaker & Getter, 1975). Low educational attainment decreases the probability of upper social mobility, thus creating additional generations of low socio-economic status. Another possible explanation for the low socio-economic status is the Mexican-American's seemingly rare participation in long term risk-taking behaviors; instead, there appears to be a tendency to make short-term vocational plans allowing for only immediate gratification (Fardoust, 1978). The literature empirically supports the fact that the level of acculturation and family style (Ramirez, 1967; Edington & Hays, 1978; Madsen, 1965; Bonnheim, 1977; and others) is one of the main determinants of the values and attitudes of the Mexican-

Americans, specifically when dealing with vocationally related issues. This in fact supports the idea that ethnicity is not the single predominant determinant, a conclusion also supported by Khoury and Thurmond's (1978) study of time perspectives, Vasquez's (1978) study of Mexican-American female persistence and attrition in college, Aiken's (1979) studies of Mexican-American values on higher education, and Berman and Haug's (1975) study on Mexican-American mobility orientation. Berman and Haug (1975) further refuted the idea of ethnicity as a single determinant factor of any attitude in a specific culture by stating, "The key component in understanding mobility orientations is the level of individual aspirations, a variable entirely disassociated from sex-race characteristics" (Berman & Haug, 1975, p. 166). This quotation from a study of sex-race relationships in vocational choices clearly indicates that people are individuals regardless of sex or race and that one must consider their individuality when dealing with the issue of vocational choice.

In spite of all argumentation in favor of or against a specific factor or factors which influence the vocational aspirations of Mexican-Americans, no particular response seems to provide an adequate answer to the question. Instead, one must realize that Mexican-Americans vary in their behaviors like any other ethnic group, and one must be careful to avoid stereotypes when dealing with questions about their vocational behavior; however, this review of the literature suggests community atmosphere (e.g., Martinez et al., 1979; Ramirez, 1967; Vasquez, 1978; Bonnheim, 1977; and Rousek, 1976) is important in providing opportunities and models for the Mexican-American. After all, Edington and Hays (1975) showed that Mexican-Americans and Anglo Americans possess very similar vocational and educational values which leads us to believe that Mexican-Americans have the same potentialities as Anglo Americans

when dealing with vocational matters.

As a final thought, one might ask if the root of the problem resides in the supposed lack of aspirations in the Mexican-American culture or in the obstacles which the general culture places in Mexican-Americans' paths as they attempt to attain their aspirations. The literature reviewed here, as well as other studies (e.g., Kuvlesky & Juarez, 1975) suggest the latter as the more accurate explanation.

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